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# Consensus, Conflict, or Compromise? State-Church Relations in the Swedish "People's Home" During the 1920s and 1930s

Ingela K. Naumann

Q1

What does religion have to do with the Swedish welfare state? "Nothing" has been the established view among social scientists. "Everything" has been the response by some scholars in recent years. Social scientists maintain that the Swedish welfare state is, in essence, a Social Democratic welfare state, its comprehensive and generous welfare provision mirroring the principles and politics of Social Democracy, which was long the dominant political force in modern Sweden.<sup>1</sup> If concerned with religion at all, researchers have pointed to the absence of religious cleavages in Swedish party politics and thus their irrelevance for welfare state development.<sup>2</sup> According

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1. See, e.g., Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

2. John D. Stephens, "Religion and Politics in Three Northwest European Democracies," *Comparative Social Research* 2 (1979): 129-57; Lars Bo Kaspersen and

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to this account, core features of Swedish welfare—universalism, an emphasis on equality and public social service provision—reflect the interests and redistributive aims of the labor movement and the Social Democratic Party’s ability to forge class alliances.<sup>3</sup> In the past, historians and historically oriented social scientists have qualified the “Social Democratic thesis,” pointing to a series of historic and cultural conditions for the success of this welfare state model, such as the strong ethnic, cultural, and religious homogeneity of the Swedish population.<sup>4</sup> Recently, however, this argument has been taken even further. 20 25

Political scientist Tim Knudsen, for example, argues that the Lutheran Church was centrally involved in creating this homogeneity in linguistic and religious terms.<sup>5</sup> Further, he identifies how the historic institutional and administrative structures developed by the Lutheran state church provided a fundamental precondition for the universal welfare state. Particularly in the figure of the local pastor, who took on both secular and spiritual functions in the agrarian communities, a link between state and society was created and a basis laid for the development of the expectation that the state should be responsible for social welfare.<sup>6</sup> Historian Uffe Østergård goes even further still, maintaining that there is a strong ideological link between the Social Democratic policy visions and Lutheranism in Nordic countries.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the focus on full employment and on social security for all, characteristic of the Nordic welfare states, mirror two central ideas in Lutheranism: daily work as the fulfillment of God’s vocation and a “priesthood of all believers,”<sup>8</sup> the latter promoting a culture of equality where large social differences become 30 35 40

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Johannes Lindvall, “Why No Religious Politics? The Secularization of Poor Relief and Primary Education in Denmark and Sweden,” *Archive Européen Sociologique* XLIX (2008): 119-43.

3. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds*; Gøsta Esping-Andersen and Walter Korpi, “Social Policy as Class Politics in Post-War Capitalism: Scandinavia, Austria, and Germany,” in *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, ed. John H. Goldthorpe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 179-208.

4. See, e.g., Nanna Kildal and Stein Kuhnle, ed., *Normative Foundations of the Welfare State: The Nordic Experience* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2005).

5. Tim Knudsen, “Tilblivelsen af den universalistiske velfærdsstat,” in *Den nordiske protestantisme og velfærdsstaten*, ed. Tim Knudsen (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2000), 20-64.

6. *Ibid.*, 41.

7. Uffe Østergård, “The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity—From Composite States to Nation-States,” in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

8. See also Dag Thorkildsen, “Religious Identity and Nordic Identity,” in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 138-60.

unacceptable. The Nordic welfare state, according to Østergård, is de facto a “Lutheran welfare state” based on “secularized Lutheranism.” 45

Other scholars take a more moderate stance in what is now a growing field of research into the role of religion in modern welfare states, maintaining that Lutheranism and the Lutheran Church were influential in the way the Swedish welfare state evolved, albeit not the only or perhaps most important factors.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, this strand of research takes inspiration from Stein Rokkans’s seminal work on social cleavages and modern state formation.<sup>10</sup> For example, Sigrun Kahl points to the indirect influence of the Lutheran ethical doctrine that led the Lutheran Church to accept the development of poor relief and early welfare state programs.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, Manow and van Kersbergen,<sup>12</sup> while describing the absence of religious conflict in Swedish party politics, emphasize the positive contribution of the Lutheran Church to the development of the Swedish welfare state by not opposing, or even welcoming, the introduction of state welfare.<sup>13</sup> And Thomas Bahle more specifically relates the extensive public service provision in the Swedish welfare state to the nonconflictual and consensual nature of state-church relations in Sweden.<sup>14</sup> 50 55 Q3 60

This Rokkanian perspective does not challenge the Social Democratic thesis of the Swedish welfare state outlined above, but it makes an important amendment: religion was not irrelevant in the 65

9. Thomas Bahle, *Familienpolitik in Westeuropa: Ursprünge und Wandel im internationalen Vergleich* (Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus, 1995); Thomas Bahle, “Public Child Care in Europe: Historical Trajectories and New Directions,” in *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives*, ed. Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 23-42; Sigrun Kahl, “The Religious Roots of Modern Poverty Policy: Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Protestant Traditions Compared,” *European Journal of Sociology* 45 (2005): 91-126; Kimberly Morgan, *Working Mothers and the Welfare State: Religion and the Politics of Work-Family Policies in Western Europe and The United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Kimberly Morgan, “Forging the Frontiers between State, Church, and Family: Religious Cleavages and the Origins of Early Childhood Education in France, Sweden, and Germany,” *Politics and Society*, 30, no. 1 (2002): 259-89. Philip Manow and Kees van Kersbergen, “Religion and the Western Welfare State—The Theoretical Context,” in *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States*, ed. Philip Manow and Kees van Kersbergen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-38; Kaspersen and Lindvall, “Why No Religious.”

10. Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction,” in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (New York: Free Press, 1967), 1-64.

11. Kahl, “The Religious Roots.”

12. Manow & van Kersbergen, “Religion and the Western Welfare States.”

13. Ibid., 4.

14. Bahle, *Familienpolitik*; Bahle, “Public Child Care.”

formative phases of the welfare state in Sweden; rather, the Lutheran Church left it to the state, and in that sense to whomever was in power, to develop social welfare programs. This view makes space for an understanding of the Swedish Lutheran Church as an active player in key processes of modern society and allows for the contrafactual possibility that the Church PER CHICAGO 8.106, could also have opposed or slowed down the development of social policy and thus changed the course of welfare state history. If consensus between the church and the state was a condition for the type of welfare state that developed, we then should speak not only of a "Social Democratic class alliance" as a basis for the Swedish welfare state, but also for a "state/church alliance." Or, to spin this thought further, for a "Social Democratic state/church alliance."

However, would such an alliance, or consensual relationship, between state and church in a specifically Social Democratic welfare state not need further explanation? It is not difficult to see how consensual relationships would be possible if there were congruence of principles and values between the national government and the church, as was the case during most of post-reformatory history up until the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> But such relations are not self-evident with a Social Democratic government. In fact, Swedish Social Democracy was closely linked to the social movements that opposed the "ancient regime," including the Swedish Church, and harbored strong antireligious and anticlerical sentiments.<sup>16</sup> Many Lutheran clerics were no less critical of Social Democracy and its vision of modern society.<sup>17</sup> Thus, strong tensions between the government and the Lutheran Church<sup>18</sup> could have been expected when the Social

15. Henrik Stenius, "The Good Life is a Life of Conformity: The Impact of Lutheran Tradition on Nordic Political Culture," in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 161-71.

16. Sven E. Olsson, *Social Policy and the Welfare State in Sweden*, 2nd enl. ed. (Lund: Arkiv Förlag, 1993); Urban Claesson, *Folkhemmets kyrka. Harald Hallén och folkkyrkans genombrott. En studie av socialdemokrati, kyrka och nationsbyggande med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1905-1933* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2004); Herbert Tingsten, *Den Svenska Socialdemokratiens Ideutveckling II* (Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1941).

17. Sören Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan. Om Svenska kyrkan, folket och staten* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2003); Karl J. Höjer, *Svensk Socialpolitisk historia* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1952).

18. The Lutheran Church in Sweden officially identifies itself as "Evangelical Lutheran Church" and calls itself "Swedish Church" (*svenska kyrkan*). In this article the terms "Swedish Church," "Lutheran Church," "state church," and the "Church" are used interchangeably.

Democratic Party (SAP)<sup>19</sup> became a leading political force. Why, then, was there not more open conflict? How did the SAP government and the Lutheran Church negotiate their relationship? 95

It is these questions this article aims to explore by examining the state-church relationship in Sweden during the first decades of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on the 1920s and 1930s as a formative phase in Swedish welfare state history. While the main expansion of the welfare state in Sweden fell into the postwar period, the 1920s and 1930s were politically important for laying the basis for the Swedish welfare state compromise: modern democracy had been established with the introduction of universal suffrage; the SAP rose to power, starting a long period of political dominance in Sweden, and developed its welfare state vision of the “people’s home”; and the “red-green alliance” between workers and farmers was forged, allowing for the development of comprehensive, universal social programs.<sup>20</sup> As this article will show, the 1920s and 1930s were also a period in which the relationship between the state and the Church was renegotiated, with the state-church system itself being put into question from both sides. 100 105 110

This article follows in the Rokkanian research tradition of understanding historical social cleavages as a basis for the national political constellations that shaped welfare state development but aims to amend it in two ways: first, it finds that the consensual character of the state-church relationship in Sweden has been overstated; to the contrary, the formative phase of welfare state development was a period of strong contention. Second, attention to the shifting cleavage structure and, in particular, to the intersection of class and religion in the formation of the political parties helps us to better understand how the forging of strategic compromises between the state and the Church and the development of shared national narratives became possible. 115 120 125

This article will first review some arguments that have been made with respect to the role of religion in the Swedish welfare state. It will then use a process-oriented historical approach to provide a more detailed understanding of the state-church relationship in the early twentieth century. It will discuss the way class and religious cleavages intersected at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century to create the specific political constellations of the time, and then outline changing orientations within SAP and the Swedish Church and how these affected the relation between 130

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19. The Swedish Social Democratic Labor Party is, in the European context, commonly known as SAP—an abbreviation of its Swedish name “Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetarparti.”

20. Bo Stråth, *Sveriges Historia, 1830-1920* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 2012).



the two. Historian Bo Stråth has emphasized the importance of the “folk” concept (the “people”) for the development of national identity and a shared conception of society in Sweden during the interwar years.<sup>21</sup> This article will also show how the “people” concept became an important integrative trope, creating bridges between the popular movements (*folkkrörelser*): the Social Democrat’s vision of the welfare state as a “people’s home” (*folkhem*) and the state church as a reformed “people’s church” (*folkkyrka*), both of which helped diffuse religious conflict in the early phase of the Swedish welfare state.

## Implications of a State-Church System for State-Church Relations

Most welfare state researchers believe that the relationship between state and church in Sweden has historically been consensual and unproblematic.<sup>22</sup> Yet there has been little probing into why this would be the case. From a Rokkanian perspective this state-church consensus is the result of religious homogeneity and the state-church system.<sup>23</sup> Following the Reformation, and as decreed by the 1593 Uppsala convocation, Lutheranism became the national religion in Sweden and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church became the Swedish national church; thus, by default, all subjects of the king had to be Lutheran. It was only in 1860 that the presence of other Christian churches was officially tolerated and conversions were permitted.<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, 99 percent of the population was Lutheran.<sup>25</sup> The establishment of a state-church system

21. Bo Stråth, “Nordic Capitalism and Democratization,” in *The Democratic Challenge to Capitalism: Management and Democracy in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Haldor Byrkjeflot et al. (Oslo: Fagbokförlaget, 2001); Bo Stråth, “The Normative Foundations of the Scandinavian Welfare States in Historical Perspective,” in *Normative Foundations of the Welfare State: The Nordic Experience*, eds. Nanna Kildal and Stein Kuhnle (New York: Routledge, 2005), 34–51; Bo Stråth, “Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation der Religionsausübung Schwedens,” in *Baupläne der sichtbaren Kirche. Sprachliche Konzepte religiöser Vergemeinschaftung in Europa*, ed. Lucian Hölscher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 168–95.

22. Anders Bäckström, *Svenska kyrkan som välfärdsaktör i en global kultur. En studie av religion och omsorg* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2000); Bahle, “Public Child Care”; Manow and van Kersbergen, “Religion and the Western Welfare State”; and Morgan, *Working Mothers*. For a different version see Stråth, “Der Volksbegriff in der Organization.”

23. Lipset and Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures.”

24. Full religious freedom was, however, only established in Sweden in 1951. See Göran Gustafsson, “Church-State Separation Swedish-Style,” in *West European Politics* 26 (2003): 51–72.

25. Stenius, “The Good Life”; Pirjo Markkola, “Introduction: The Lutheran Context of Nordic Women’s History,” in *Gender and Vocation: Women, Religion and Social*

created strong ties between the state and the Church: the state's interests became also the Church's interests, and the Swedish Church to some extent became a state bureaucracy, taking on important secular functions alongside religious ones.<sup>26</sup> 160

It has been argued that, due to its close links to the state apparatus, the Swedish Church did not need to organize countermobilizations in reaction to the rise of liberalism, socialism, and other protest movements in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> This argument, however, underestimates the social cleavages that opened up in this period and the ensuing political conflicts. 165

Religious revivalism became an influential social movement in Swedish society in the nineteenth century and played an important role in transforming a premodern agrarian society into a modern one.<sup>28</sup> The Swedish Church as High Church was strongly opposed to religious revivalism, which led to a polarization between the official Lutheran Church and the free churches. By the early twentieth century, the revivalist movement mobilized as many Swedes as the labor movement, around 10 percent of the Swedish population.<sup>29</sup> This new religious cleavage between the Lutheran Church and the free churches also affected the political system: in 1910, 22 percent of parliamentarians belonged to a free church.<sup>30</sup> 170 175 180

Also the extent of the alleged "state/church consensus" needs to be questioned in this period. A consensus would come relatively easily between the government and the Church when both recruited from the same national elite and both supported the same social order, as was the case during most of post-reformatory history in Sweden. However, it is a bit less obvious in a situation when, in effect, the usurpers—those that want to overthrow the old order—take over the house, as was the case when the Liberals and SAP came into power in the early twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> As we shall see, the question 185 Q7

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*Change in the Nordic Countries, 1830-1940*, ed. Pirjo Markkola (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2000), 12.

26. Gustafsson, "Church-State Separation,"; Knudsen, "Tilblivelsen."

27. Stephens, "Religion and Politics."

28. Thorkildsen, "Religious Identity."

29. Erik Sidenvall, "Frikyrkligheten i Sverige 1920-1965," in *Sveriges Historia, 1920-1965*, ed. Yvonne Hirdman, Urban Lundberg, and Jenny Björkman (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2012), 83; Kaspersen and Lindvall, "Why No Religious," 120.

30. Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*, 137.

31. In 1911 the Liberal Party, for the first time, gained more seats in Parliament than the Conservatives and was in government until 1914. From 1917-1920 the Liberals and Social Democrats formed a coalition government. In 1920 SAP became the sole governing party. The 1920s saw a rapid succession of Left and Right governments, but from the early 1930s SAP governed almost uninterrupted for nearly fifty years. See Göran Therborn, "A Unique Chapter in the History of



of the role of the Church was integral to competing visions of what modern Swedish society should look like; attempts to separate state and church were launched from various sides, both as a means to strengthen as well as weaken the Church's position in society.<sup>32</sup>

Another argument for the absence of religious conflict in Sweden, particularly with respect to welfare state development, is that the division of labor around social welfare had already been settled before the expansion of the Swedish welfare state in the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> In premodern agrarian Sweden, the Swedish Church was the central provider of social welfare and education via local parishes, the so-called *socken*. The Church also took on several other important secular functions, such as the registering of the population. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a gradual secularization of communal responsibilities took place. In particular, in 1862 a major municipal reform ended the old *socken* system, introducing a dual communal system with a local civil government and a parish establishing a clearer division of labor between the local political authority and the Church. At the same time, the Church's role in welfare provision was reduced; in particular, poor relief became the responsibility of the public municipality.<sup>34</sup> It has been argued that the differentiation between state and church responsibilities, separating worldly from spiritual matters, was welcomed by the Swedish Church in light of the Lutheran "two kingdoms" doctrine<sup>35</sup> and took place without conflict.<sup>36</sup>

The division of labor between state and church with respect to social welfare was, however, not as neat as that; the Church, for example, remained heavily involved in school education long into the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Also health services, support for the elderly, and child care were areas where the Church and religious organizations such as the deaconry, were active and even expanded their activities during the first decades of the twentieth

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Democracy: The Social Democrats in Sweden," in *Creating Social Democracy: A Century of the Social Democratic Labor Party in Sweden*, ed. Klaus Misgeld et al. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 1-34.

32. Sven Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram öden 1928-1932* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2000); Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*; Claesson, *Folkhemmets kyrka*.

33. Kaspersen and Lindvall, "Why No Religious."

34. See Poor Relief Act 1871.

35. Dietz Lange, *Ethik in evangelischer Perspektive: Grundfragen christlicher Lebenspraxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

36. Kahl, "The Religious Roots."

37. Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*, 206. Municipal school boards were headed by the parish minister, due to the importance attributed to religious education as part of the curriculum. Kaspersen and Lindvall, "Why No Religious," 130.

century.<sup>38</sup> For example, in 1940 only 7 percent of child care services were provided by the state, with the rest being provided by private, often religiously inspired, initiatives.<sup>39</sup> These were also the areas that the Social Democratic welfare aimed to expand into in the 1930s, necessitating a renegotiation of how this social space was to be shared between state and church. 225

Karen Anderson has developed a slightly different argument. While she agrees with Kaspersen et al. and others that the Lutheran Church supported early poor relief and administrative reforms, she maintains that the Church grew increasingly hostile to the expansion of state welfare during the latter half of the nineteenth century, becoming more accepting of social change only in the early part of the twentieth century. But by the time the Church regained interest in the social question, according to Anderson, it was “too late,” as the Liberals and Social Democrats had already become the main representatives of social reform.<sup>40</sup> 230 235

In addition, from a historical perspective, this account raises questions. For centuries, the Church had been one of the most powerful institutions in Swedish society, albeit it was losing influence in the wake of the political and social reforms in the nineteenth century. Even so, the Church was still a political force to be reckoned with at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, Lutheran bishops were still holding important political and administrative positions.<sup>41</sup> And from the pulpit Lutheran pastors could effectively reach the Swedish people and influence public opinion, something that was increasingly important in the unfolding democracy. As the following will illustrate, it is perhaps not so much a question of lack of power, but the absence of a unified position that would have allowed the Church to influence the course of social policy development more clearly. Nor had clear and full-fledged welfare state programs been yet developed on the political scene. The first decades of the twentieth century were a period of searching and political maneuvers where the political parties were first developing their broader societal visions and were “testing the water” with respect to their constituencies and 240 245 250 255

38. See, e.g., Markkola, “Introduction”; Annette Leis, *Den kyrkliga diakonins roll inom ramen för två välfärdssystem. En jämförande fallstudie av två diakoninstititioner i Sverige och Tyskland* (Uppsala: Sociology of Religions, 2004); and Leis.

39. Peter Antman, *Barn och äldreomsorg i Tyskland och Sverige. Sverigedelen* (Stockholm: Socialdepartementet, 1996).

40. Karen M. Anderson, “The Church as Nation? The Role of Religion in the Development of the Swedish Welfare State,” in *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States*, ed. Philip Manow and Kees van Kersbergen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 213.

41. Ulrika Lagerlöf Nilsson, “The Bishops in the Church of Sweden,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30 (2005): 308–19.

potential alliances.<sup>42</sup> The existing social insurances and social policies were rudimentary and in many respects still a continuation of the poor law tradition.<sup>43</sup> Also within the Swedish Church, a range of theological and political responses were developed to the “social question” as different clerics engaged with the social and political changes in different ways.<sup>44</sup> While some directly opposed increased social spending, others actively promoted the development of specific social policies.<sup>45</sup> 260

The three accounts presented here all assume unified political and social actors whose positions are clearly defined, whereas detailed historical analysis often demonstrates that the political reality was more complex. Interestingly they identify three different historical periods<sup>46</sup> for initiating institutional trajectories that, in these accounts, determined state-church relations in Sweden. This indicates that there were different junctures in time where a renegotiation of the power balance between state and church were possible and, indeed, had taken place. Notably Anderson, as well as Kahl, has discussed how the Church in Sweden changed its position and strategies in relation to the changing social and political environment<sup>47</sup>—and so, of course, did other political actors. The following study demonstrates that it was the changing cleavage structure, and the new cross-cutting lines between class and religion in particular, that formed a dynamic political field in the early twentieth century, creating overlap of interests and positions between political parties as well as contention within parties.<sup>48</sup> Analyzing this interplay between actors helps explain why there was not more outright conflict between SAP, when in government, and the Church. In short, a path 265 270 275 280

42. The political field was quite dynamic in the first decades of the twentieth century with many political parties experiencing splits and new formations in this period. See Yvonne Hirdmann, Urban Lundberg, and Jenny Björkman, *Sveriges Historia 1920-1965* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 2012), 122ff.

43. Klas Åmark, *Hundra år av välfärdspolitik. Välfärdsstatens framväxt i Norge och Sverige* (Umeå: Borea, 2005); Olsson, *Social Policy*.

44. Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*.

45. See, e.g., Höjer, *Svensk Socialpolitisk historia*, 52.

46. The reformation in the Rokkanian account; the mid-nineteenth century for Kaspersen and Lindvall, and the early twentieth century in Anderson's case, see Flora “State Formation”; Kaspersen and Lindvall, “Why No Religious”; Anderson, “The Church as Nation.”

47. Anderson, “The Church as Nation”; Sigrun Kahl, “Religious Doctrines and Poor Relief: A Different Causal Pathway,” in *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States*, ed. Philip Manow and Kees van Kersbergen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 267-96.

48. See for a fuller discussion Ingela Naumann, “Childcare Politics in the ‘New’ Welfare State: Class, Religion, and Gender in the Shaping of Political Agendas,” in *The Politics of the New Welfare State*, ed. Giuliano Bonoli and David Natali (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 158-81.

of compromise and conflict avoidance that has become characteristic of Swedish political culture was followed.<sup>49</sup>

## Political Constellations and Crosscutting Cleavages in the Early Twentieth Century 285

It has frequently been pointed out that the success of SAP in creating a “Social Democratic welfare state” not only rested on labor movement strength (and the connection between SAP and the trade unions), but on SAP’s ability to forge cross-class alliances: first with the farmers in the 1930s, then with the middle classes later on in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>50</sup> It is less often discussed in what ways the link between the Swedish labor movement with other popular movements shaped SAP’s relationship and approach to religion. This section looks at the way class and religious cleavages cut across party lines in the early twentieth century, analyzing how they created tensions and conflict as well as opening space for the formulation of shared political narratives and compromises. 290 295

In Sweden, industrialization started late in the second half of the nineteenth century but then took off with great intensity. Economic change led to considerable uprooting of traditional agrarian communities and intensified the misery of vast parts of the already poor Swedish population. The young and healthy left the villages in great numbers and headed to the cities or across the sea. Between 1851 and 1930 approximately 1.4 million people emigrated from Sweden to the United States, a substantial loss of population considering that the population of Sweden in 1900 was only 5.1 million.<sup>51</sup> 300 305

These great transformations and the concomitant social problems they created triggered the mobilization of a series of social movements, the so-called popular movements: the temperance movement, religious freethinkers, feminists, consumer cooperatives, and the workers’ movement.<sup>52</sup> What united all of the popular movements was their protest against the “old regime”—the rigid and conservative, preindustrial, and premodern social order upheld by the 310

49. Danwart A. Rustow, *The Politics of Compromise: A Study of Parties and Cabinet Government in Sweden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); Göran Rosenberg, “The Crisis of Consensus in Postwar Sweden,” in *Culture and Crisis: The Case of Germany and Sweden*, ed. Nina Witoszek and Lars Trägårdh (New York/Oslo: Berghahn Books, 2002), 170-201.

50. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds*; Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

51. Lena Sommestad, “Welfare State Attitudes to the Male Breadwinning System: The United States and Sweden in Comparative Perspective,” in: Angelique Janssens, ed., *The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinning Family?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 153-74.

52. Olsson, *Social Policy*, 47.

nobility, the bourgeoisie, and an orthodox state church; a deep concern with the social and spiritual conditions of human life; a striving for equality, solidarity, and justice; and the demand for greater democratization of society.<sup>53</sup>

Religious revivalism was the first of the popular movements to emerge and was in many ways influenced by the Pietism of the eighteenth century. Pietism emphasized the Protestant concept of a “priesthood of all believers,” and in its radical form maintained that “there was no authority except from God,” thus challenging the Lutheran social order and its hierarchies. It was predominantly lay-people who were active in the free churches of the nineteenth century, challenging both the hierarchies of the Lutheran Church as well as the political order of traditional society with its estates. Religious revivalism, therefore, not only led to claims for religious freedom but also demands for political freedom such as the right to assembly.<sup>54</sup> The Swedish Church was, from the outset, hostile toward Pietists and to the emergence of free churches. According to Thorkildsen, the Swedish Lutheran Church was a High Church, a conservative, orthodox church that did not tolerate individualistic, revivalist tendencies in the parishes.<sup>55</sup> Many Lutheran clerics tended to align themselves with political conservatism and the attempt to preserve the traditional social order, though some showed more social interest.<sup>56</sup> Nathan Söderblom, archbishop from 1914, emphasized that the social question was one of great importance to the Church, but that it did not naturally stand on the side of a specific political party. Rather it was on the side of those in need. There were, however, also those Lutheran churchmen who specifically supported the Left.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the Swedish Church’s generally conservative stance fuelled the ongoing alienation of parts of the population from official Lutheranism, and the Church’s reaction to religious revivalism caused strong polarization between the official state church and the free churches.<sup>58</sup>

Politically, religious revivalism was most closely associated with Liberalism and ideas of building a society on free and liberal foundations. The free churches also fostered religiously motivated social activism, and thus presented a conception of the organization of social welfare on the basis of individual social engagement that was

53. Göran Therborn, “‘Pillarization’ and ‘Popular Movements’: Two Variants of Welfare State Capitalism: The Netherlands and Sweden,” in *The Comparative History of Public Policy*, ed. Francis G. Castles (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 198.

54. Thorkildsen, “Religious Identity,” 247.

55. *Ibid.*, 147.

56. Tingsten, *Den Svenska Socialdemokratiens*, 296.

57. Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*, 22.

58. Thorkildsen, “Religious Identity,” 146.

both different from Social Democratic and social conservative visions.<sup>59</sup> The free churches attracted upwardly striving social groups in particular, such as shop clerks and craftsmen, both in rural and urban settings, who were important in the formation of a modern middle class.<sup>60</sup> But some revivalist associations, for example the Salvation Army, were particularly popular with the urban working class.<sup>61</sup>

Memberships in the popular mass movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often overlapped, and it has been emphasized how the cultural environment created by religious revivalism and temperance organizations, propagating a disciplined lifestyle of daily work, sobriety, and simplicity, became essential for labor organizing.<sup>62</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, around a third of Sweden's population was organized in one or more of the popular movements, giving them political weight in the nascent Swedish democracy. But neither religious revivalism nor the temperance movement had the ambition to form a parliamentary party, as did the labor movement. In the political arena, SAP thus became the "main carrier" of the popular movement tradition in Sweden.<sup>63</sup> The first Social Democratic Party leader Hjalmar Branting noted that SAP was in fact a "people's party" rather than a class party.<sup>64</sup> The fact that the majority of SAP parliamentarians were teetotalers and many belonged to free churches illustrates the interconnectedness of the popular movements. Also, other political parties could lay claim to representing the interests of the popular movements: the Liberal Party even named itself "people's party" (*folkpartiet*) in 1934, while the Farmers' Party (*Bondeförbundet*, later called *Centerpartiet*, "party of the centre") also claimed to speak for "the people."<sup>65</sup>

Some scholars have emphasized this link between the popular movements and various political parties, as well as their coalition building as the basis for the development of the Swedish welfare state.<sup>66</sup> However, the intersections of social cleavages around class and religion, as well as the urban and rural sections of the population,

59. Sidenvall, "Frikyrkligheten i Sverige," 83.

60. Ibid., 84; Thorkildsen, "Religious Identity," 147.

61. Sidenvall, "Frikyrkligheten i Sverige," 85.

62. Olsson, *Social Policy*, 49; Therborn, "Pillarization"; Thorkildsen, "Religious Identity"; Stråth, "Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation."

63. Therborn, "Pillarization," 201.

64. Bernd Henningsen, *Der Wohlfahrtsstaat Schweden* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986).

65. Today, the Centre Party and the Liberal Party in Sweden are considered part of the Right political block together with the other conservative parties. But in the early twentieth century the Liberals were seen to belong to the political Left together with the Social Democrats.

66. Therborn, "Pillarization"; Olsson, *Social Policy*.



also caused problems for political parties. This was arguably most 385  
 strongly felt among the Liberals, as the free church and temperance  
 movements effectively split the middle class.<sup>67</sup> As a result, in 1923  
 party-internal conflicts led to the split of the Liberal Party.<sup>68</sup> But the  
 crosscutting lines of religion and class also caused tensions within  
 the Social Democratic Party. In its early phases SAP was not only anti- 390  
 church but also antireligious.<sup>69</sup> The Social Democratic Party program  
 of 1890 explicitly stated its commitment to abolishing the state  
 Church system. On the issue of religion in general the program was 395  
 more prudent, adopting a neutral position, most likely taking into  
 account the sizable following from the free churches. Religion was  
 to be an exclusively private matter and an individual choice. Still  
 stronger antireligious attitudes existed in the labor movement: in  
 1917 the radical left wing of SAP split off, forming the Communist  
 Party,<sup>70</sup> taking with it those most ardently opposed to religion. Yet,  
 the Swedish Church and its clergy, with their often authoritarian 400  
 demeanor, were seen by many Social Democrats as the class  
 enemy.<sup>71</sup> There were, however, several important Christian politi-  
 cians active in SAP that would shape the party's stance toward the  
 Swedish Church in a way that toned down state-church conflict,  
 which created space for compromise. 405

Within SAP, the crosscutting religious and class affiliations can  
 perhaps most clearly be represented through the example of two  
 key figures in the party: leading church politicians Arthur Engberg  
 and Harald Hallén. Engberg was one of the leading Social Democratic  
 politicians and held a very critical attitude toward the Lutheran 410  
 Church. Early on, he ardently promoted the abolition of the state  
 Church system but would later change his position. However,  
 Engberg was not necessarily antireligious. As a child, he grew up  
 under the influence of religious revivalism, his father being a  
 Baptist; however, he became influenced by Marxism as a young 415  
 man.<sup>72</sup> In 1932 Engberg became SAP's minister of Ecclesiastic  
 Affairs and is today positively remembered for his passionate  
 engagement in revising the psalmbook of the Lutheran Church.<sup>73</sup> In  
 short, Engberg had a complicated relationship with the Church. In  
 opposition to Engberg on religious questions stood another leading 420  
 Social Democrat. Hallén was a pastor in Arvika and was strongly

67. Stråth, "Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation."

68. In 1934 the different liberal parties were reunited in the Liberal "people's party."

69. Gustafsson, "Church-State Separation," 53.

70. Stråth, *Sveriges Historia*.

71. Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*, 32; Claesson, *Folkhemmets kyrka*, 264.

72. Claesson, *Folkhemmets kyrka*.

73. Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*.

active in the temperance movement. From 1911–1960 Hallén was a member of the second chamber of Parliament for SAP. He was a member of the party's leadership from 1928–1932, the period when the Social Democratic vision of the “people's home” became influential in the party. Hallén promoted the perpetuation of the state Church system with a vision of transforming the Swedish Church into a “people's church” open to all citizens. The term “the people” was to become a key concept in political discourse in Sweden in the 1920s and 1930s, and Hallén's idea of a democratic people's church would help integrate the Swedish Church into the Social Democratic vision of modern Swedish society as a “people's home.”

### From Popular Movements to “People's Home” and “People's Church”

Bo Stråth has emphasized the symbolic importance of the term *folk*, meaning “the people,” in the Swedish political discourse of the early twentieth century and its part in creating a national identity and linking agrarian society with modern society. Folk, as it came to be understood in Sweden, had many layers of oscillating meaning, pointing to the preservation of a national cultural heritage while also including the concept of a progressive, forward-looking nation. The term received political meaning, in the way the mass “popular movements” claimed to represent the Swedish “people,” and it also had strong religious connotations.<sup>74</sup>

During the 1920s SAP was effective in integrating the “people” concept into its social policy agenda by coining the metaphor of the Swedish “people's home” (*folkhem*). In a famous speech before Parliament in 1928, party leader Per Albin Hansson outlined his vision of a future egalitarian welfare state, explaining that it was to be guided by the same values and principles as a good family home: equality, solidarity, cooperation, and helpfulness. No one was privileged or outcast, oppressed or exploited.<sup>75</sup>

By using the metaphor of the People's Home for its vision of modern society, the Social Democrats demonstrated two things. First, it marked a turning away from a revolutionary, Marxist discourse toward social reformism. It was a shift from the class struggle and work/capital antagonism toward “family” and “home,” places—at

74. Stråth, “Nordic Capitalism and Democratization”; Stråth, “Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation.”

75. Per Albin Hansson's famous speech of 1928 has been recounted by numerous scholarly narrations of Sweden's recent history. See, for example, Hugh Heclo and Henrik J. Madsen, *Policy and Politics in Sweden: Principled Pragmatism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Hirdmann, *Sveriges Historia*, 150.

least symbolically—of harmony and cooperation, discursive domains traditionally occupied by conservative political forces.<sup>76</sup> Secondly, the usage of the phrase “Swedish People’s Home” enhanced the SAP’s claim to be a “people’s party,” the true representatives of the Swedish people, not just the working class.

However, at the beginning of the twentieth century the “folk” term was not necessarily a Left concept; there were many interest groups in Swedish society that lay claim to this term. In 1906 agrarian minister and farmer Alfred Petterson used for the first time the phrase “people’s home.” In 1912 the Uppsala professor and “young conservative” Rudolf Kjéllen more explicitly developed a conservative concept of a “People’s Home.” Kjéllen much admired Wilhelmine (Bismarckian) Germany and took inspiration from the German “*Volk*” for his concept of a Swedish “*folk hem*.” Kjéllen conceptualized the People’s Home as a national and social conservative reform model and as a response to the class struggle discourse of the labor movement.<sup>77</sup> The proposed reforms included “welfare for all” and active population policy as an instrument for social peace and as a means to stop emigration. Thus, the *folkhem* as a symbol and reform project for a happy, Swedish national community was at first the conservatives’ reaction to the threat posed by the popular movements. It was the National Conservatives’ acknowledgement that the “old regime” of the Swedish empire had had its day, and that in the face of great social and economic transformations, a renewal and reformation of the old system was needed. The *folkhem* was at first an attempt to reform society along conservative and traditional premises.<sup>78</sup>

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the conservatives and the Social Democrats competed over who were the true representatives of the Swedish “folk” and whose social reform programs would be the most viable to solve the nation’s social problems. The Social Democrats emerged as victors of this contest; from the 1930s onwards, the People’s Home became the image for the Social Democratic welfare state.<sup>79</sup>

76. Yvonne Hirdman, *Att lägga livet till rätta – studier i svensk folkhemspolitik* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1989), 92; Valeska Henze, *Das schwedische Volksheim. Zur Struktur und Funktion eines politischen Ordnungsmodells* (European University Institute, Florenz and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1999).

77. Stråth, “Nordic Capitalism”; Henningsen, *Der Wohlfahrtsstaat Schweden*.

78. See Henze, *Das schwedische Volksheim*, 26–\_\_\_; Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*, 49.

79. Stråth, “Nordic Capitalism,” 55; Lars Trägårdh has pointed out that here lies arguably also the decisive difference between the developments of political discourse and action around the “folk” concept in Germany and Sweden: that it became a Social Democratic concept in Sweden, while it remained a conservative, national-socialist one in Germany. See Lars Trägårdh, “Varieties of Volkish Ideologies: Sweden and Germany 1848-1933,” in Bo Stråth, ed., *Language and the*

The folk concept was also embraced within the ranks of the Swedish Church. A group of mainly young Lutheran theologians (for example Sundström, Billing, Björkqvist, and later Runestam, Aulén, and Nyberg), the so-called young churchmen (*ungkyrkomän*), used the term—in line with Kjellen’s nationalist-conservative ideas—as a description of their Christian-national vision of society.<sup>80</sup> Using the slogan “The Swedish People, God’s People,” they propagated church reforms that would turn the Swedish Church into a “people’s church,” a church that was closer to the people and actively engaged with modern developments and new needs arising from societal transformations. 495 500

Under the pressure of criticism by the free churches, as well as the continued secularization process in society, the folk church concept was the Swedish Church’s attempt to find a new, theologically grounded identity that would restore its moral authority and offer an alternative to the class language in relation to the social question.<sup>81</sup> “The folk church concept was a conscious theological model for a Church meeting modern society.”<sup>82</sup> 505

A characteristic of the Swedish theological discourse of the time was its emphasis on the practical implications that sprang from Lutheran ethical principles. Selfless “love-action” or service to others always had to be materialized and situated in concrete action. Another important aspect of Lutheran ethics in the Swedish tradition was the contention that a social and legal order was never identical with the divine order. Thus, changing an existing social order might even be a Christian obligation. It is important to note, then, that Swedish Lutheran theology did not oppose state involvement in social welfare. To the contrary, from a Lutheran ethical perspective, social reforms that fought against economic inhumanity caused by capitalist profit maximization were seen as society’s obligation,<sup>83</sup> and it was welcomed from a Lutheran perspective if the state took on this responsibility. However, this interpretation of Lutheran ethics also provided an opportunity for a more activist Protestantism, laying out a Christian foundation for social reform that could serve as inspiration for philanthropic reform projects and give the Swedish Church a theological legitimization for its increased 510 515 520 525

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*Construction of Class Identities: The Struggle for Discursive Power in Social Organisation: Scandinavia and Germany after 1800* (Gothenburgh: Gothenburg University, 1990).

80. Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*, 49.

81. Gustafsson, “Church-State Separation,” 54; Stråth, “Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation.”

82. Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*, 303.

83. Gustaf Aulén, *Kann något kristet krav ställas på staten?* (Stockholm, 1940).

engagement in society and politics. The diverse field of religiously motivated social welfare initiatives, instigated by the deaconry, individuals, and religiously oriented organizations during the nineteenth century, grew during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>84</sup> 530

## The “Truce” Between State and Church in the Interwar Years

At the turn of the century, a certain easing of the tensions between the Church and Social Democracy took place; the Church started to open up toward social changes and developed a new understanding of its role and place in modern society, and SAP began to tone down its animosity toward the Church. Yet during World War I the cleavage between the Church and SAP deepened again. Fueled by growing nationalism and pressing social challenges, deep demarcation lines opened in society between a conservative bloc, prioritizing defense expenses, and a social liberal/labor bloc, pushing for social reform. Many clerics of the Swedish Church had openly supported the “farmers’ march” of 1914 that organized 30,000 farmers in protest against the Social Liberal???? government and tried to assert the authority of the king. It was countered by a workers’ march, mobilizing 50,000 workers to demonstrate popular resistance against a “fortified poor house.”<sup>85</sup> In this situation, the Swedish Church became visible as a force that attempted to thwart attempts to modernize and democratize society. 535 540 545 Q11 550

In 1917 SAP took up government for the first time in coalition with the Liberals, and in the following year put a series of motions before Parliament aimed at diminishing the Church’s role in society, demanding the abolition of the state-church system, separation of education from religion, and religious freedom. The motions were blocked, however, by the first chamber??? Upper house???. In 1920 SAP’s party congress reinforced demands for a separation of state and church in the new party program.<sup>86</sup> Engberg was a leading force behind these initiatives; arguing from a Marxist perspective, he declared the Swedish Church to be, in fact, the church of the ruling class, and contended that if the ruling class defended the state-church system, they only did so out of moral self-defense.<sup>87</sup> 555 Q11 560

84. Leis, *Den kyrkliga diakonins roll*; Elisabeth Christiansson, *Kyrklig och social reform: Motiveringar till diakoni 1845-1965* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2006).

85. Stråth, *Sveriges Historia*, 192ff.

86. K. G. Hammar, *Liberalteologi och kyrkopolitik. Kretsen kring kristendomen och vår tid, 1906-omkr.1920* (Lund: CWK Leerup Bokförlag, 1972), 318.

87. Lennart Tegborg and Urban Claesson, “Arthur Engbergs statskyrka – Harald Halléns folkkyrka. Två linjer inom svensk socialdemokrati,” *Tro & Tanke* 7 (1996): 21-43.

However, during the same party congress, Hallén produced an “opinion statement in support of religious values” signed by a considerable number of congress members. Hallén strongly advocated maintaining the state-church system but suggested a new interpretation of its role in society: according to Hallén, there existed an enlightened “folk-Christianity” in the Swedish population, but their religious orientations and needs had changed in line with societal transformations. The Swedish Church needed to be open to these developments; it should embrace the ideals of social justice and love, emphasized by the popular movements, as foundations of the Church’s message and become a democratic “people’s church” open to all Swedish citizens.

Q12 The religiosity of the Swedish people expressed in the national “People’s Church” was, according to Hallén, a necessary idealistic foundation for democracy and the Swedish “People’s Home.”<sup>88</sup>

Hallén thus posed the “people” concept against Engberg’s class perspective. Engberg received strong support within SAP in 1920; however, as the party began to move away from its class discourse in favor of a more moderate position as a “people’s party,” Hallén’s idea of the Church as an inclusive “people’s church” started to resonate and by the end of the 1920s had become an accepted Social Democratic concept. A reorientation toward religion and the state-church issue took place within the Social Democratic camp, and the focus on the state-church question started to give way to other, more pressing issues. The more conciliatory stance in SAP was, however, not only a result of its general ideological moderation, but also a tactical ploy. The leadership of the SAP realized that an overly antireligious stance might make party members resign or deter new members from joining the party, as large parts of the SAP’s constituency were deeply immersed in the cultural climate of religious Pietism. The Protestant heritage was thus something the SAP could not easily ignore.

In addition, leading Social Democrats recognized the opportunities that went along with a state Church system: as long as the Church was linked to the state, the state could exert power over it. After having led the Social Democratic campaign for separation of state and church it was, somewhat surprisingly, Engberg who, after 1920, forcefully promoted the preservation of the state Church system. Engberg now began to promote the view that “the care of religion” should not be left entirely outside the control of the state. Rather than weakening the influence of the state on religious matters, it should be strengthened.<sup>89</sup> To Engberg, the Swedish Church ought to be another branch of the state’s functions, such as the military or education; its remit should be spiritual welfare only, while social welfare was to be

88. Claesson, *Folkhemmets kyrka*, 273.

89. Gustafsson, “Church-State Separation,” 54.



delivered by the state.<sup>90</sup> This new, functional interpretation of the state-church relationship was also triggered by economic interest. If the state Church was but an administrative branch of the state, then the Church's lands and properties did not really belong to the Church but to the state: the Church was just the steward of these goods and lands.<sup>91</sup>

Church representatives, observing the new trends in the SAP toward the Swedish Church, feared such a development. They were quick to realize that the Swedish Church under a Social Democratic government would become merely an agency of the state.<sup>92</sup> Within the Swedish Church, debates ensued over the governance structure of the Church and a demand was voiced, particularly from the folk church wing, for a separation of the Church and the state. In 1929 the Swedish bishops made a historic joint proposal before the Swedish General Synod for state-church reform.<sup>93</sup> Their proposal would bring greater independence to the Church vis-à-vis the state, while also integrating the modern associational forms of social services provision that had developed since the mid-nineteenth century into the legal structure of the Church.<sup>94</sup> The bishops' argument for a greater separation of state and church was that, in the face of past developments (secularization and free church movement), the people who belonged to the state and those who adhered to the Church were not identical anymore.<sup>95</sup> The bishops further grounded their proposals with reference to the folk church concept, with the aim of seeking greater closeness to the people and greater distance from state power. The General Synod then made a request to the Swedish government for a government investigation into how to reform the state-church system along these lines.

This investigation was never undertaken. The Social Democrats, dominating the political scene, did not let the Church off the hook so easily; rather, they strengthened their grip around it by making Engberg minister of Ecclesiastic Affairs in 1932. Engberg rejected the Swedish Church's demands for separation from the state,

90. Tegborg and Claesson, "Arthur Engberg's statskyrka."

91. This economic line of thinking maybe also explains why the SAP explicitly were against "religious freedom" up until the 1950s and did not allow citizens to exit the Church of Sweden, as every Swedish citizen had to contribute to the financing of the Swedish Church.

92. Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*, 292.

93. The General Synod was set up after the Church reform in 1862 as part of a trend toward wider democratization. It was composed of clergymen and laymen. Most laymen at the beginning of the nineteenth century were social conservatives; however, this would change as the political composition in Sweden changed in future decades. See Gustafsson, "Church-State Separation."

94. Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*.

95. Stråth, "Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation."

precisely by referring to the folk church concept. He argued that the state church as a national church encompassed the whole people in an integrative, indiscriminate manner; therefore, the state church was in effect the true “people’s church.”<sup>96</sup> 640

There was, however, a short political interlude with a Liberal government from 1930–1932 that allowed the Swedish Church some maneuvering with respect to governance structures. The Liberals were not wedded to Engberg’s ideas about the state church. And when the reform plans of the Swedish Church for more independence failed, the dominant strategy within the Swedish Church became to preserve its traditional structures and strengthen the communal character of the parishes, meaning it came to focus on the medieval countryside parishes rather than on the growing urban areas. This line of action was also politically supported; in 1932 the Swedish Parliament decided on a reform to decentralize church finances, which increased the decision-making power of the local parishes and gave them the right to receive and dispose of revenue.<sup>97</sup> The preservation strategy of the Swedish Church thus showed immediate success in gaining greater financial independence in its parishes. It was, however, a victory for those who wished to preserve the old church structures and a blow to the folk church wing that sought greater engagement with modern society.<sup>98</sup> With hindsight, it seems clear that this strategic choice of the Swedish Church was more detrimental than beneficial to its position in society. 650 655 660

After 1932, there was little development in the state-church question. When SAP came back into power, they had other priorities, and the focus on the local parishes aligned well with the Social Democrats’ ideas about religion and the role of the Church. In Social Democratic imagery the state Church as a “people’s church” was constructed as the bearer of a cultural heritage at the local parish level. The Swedish Church, as the steward of local traditional parish culture, constituted a link between the Swedish agrarian past and the progressive future; the “People’s Church” was another way to reach out to the whole population in their individual religious practices, to link the people to the state—the People’s Home.<sup>99</sup> But the transformation of the Lutheran state church into a “people’s church” under Social Democratic rule began a secularization process of the Church itself. The Church accrued folkloristic elements as the bearer of a positively connoted cultural heritage. Protestantism in this process became 665 670 675

96. Thidevall, *Ett folkkyrkligt reformprogram*, 292.

97. Gustafsson, “Church-State Separation,” 55.

98. Ekström, *Makten över kyrkan*.

99. *Ibid.*, 54. See also Stråth, “Der Volksbegriff in der Organisation.”

increasingly a “cultural religion”—central in terms of Swedish peoples’ national identity but largely emptied of its religious meaning and practices.<sup>100</sup>

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The new “working relation” that had been established between the “Social Democratic state” and the Swedish Lutheran Church by the 1930s meant that the Church received more autonomy in some areas (the parishes) but that its role was reduced in others (social welfare); the state Church system was maintained, but the Church was to be inclusive and more democratically organized as a “people’s church.” Hallén’s “people’s church” concept symbolically created an important bridge between different wings within SAP, making the state-church system more palatable to those who had been critical of it while protecting the religious sensibilities of others. It also helped in the longer run to diffuse political conflict with the Conservatives and Farmers’ parties, who had been opposed to the abolition of the state-church system.

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The state-church question remained unresolved on the political agenda, but the economic crisis of the 1930s and the outbreak of World War II meant that the question slid down the political priority list. Once a “truce” had been established with the Church, the Social Democrats along with conservative governments, adapted a strategy of “conflict-avoidance” with respect to religion. In 1951 an act establishing full religious freedom passed Parliament without much contention, but the state-church question had to wait until 1958 when an official state commission was charged with looking into different reform options. They presented their lengthy conclusions in 1968, but their suggestions did not lead to any political decisions, and another investigation followed later in 1968 with results in 1972. Yet again, the issues were put to rest when it became clear that the religious cleavage still cut across political party lines, and the state-church question might risk affecting the parliamentary elections of 1973. It would, in fact, take until the turn of the next century when, finally in 2000 and on the basis of a broad societal consensus, the Church was officially separated from the state<sup>101</sup> at a time when the relation of most Swedish citizens to religion was radically different from the early twentieth century. By now Sweden had, indeed, become a thoroughly secularized and, in the wake of immigration, religiously plural country. The state-church system was now generally perceived as anachronistic.

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100. Nicholas Jay Demerath, “The Rise of ‘Cultural Religion’ in European Christianity: Learning from Poland, Northern Ireland, and Sweden,” *Social Compass* 47 (2000): 127-39.

101. Gustafsson, “Church-State Separation.”

## Concluding Remarks

Does this account of Swedish state-church relations in the early twentieth century put into question the common characterization of the Swedish welfare state as a Social Democratic welfare state? No, it does not contradict general notions of the primacy of public welfare provision and of the dominance of Social Democracy in shaping this type of welfare state. But this article challenges simplistic assumptions about the cleavage structure and political constellations that led to this outcome. In particular, it demonstrates how class conflict was overlaid with religious conflict in the formation of the political parties in Sweden, creating overlapping claims, positions, and ideologies between political parties, as well as tensions and contradictions within them. The question of the role of the Church was integral to the competing political visions of modern Swedish society in this period. And due to the historic strong ties of the Church with the state, the governance of the Church itself became a central point of conflict.

The Swedish Church and SAP were in many ways antagonists in the political struggles of the early twentieth century and strong tensions arose when SAP came into power. As a state church the Lutheran Church had been a powerful institution in Swedish society for hundreds of years, but its close links with the state also made it vulnerable to changes in the political power balance. When SAP attempted to integrate the state church as a “de-christianized” functional branch of the state (as promoted by Engberg), the Swedish bishops attempted to separate the Church from the state.

In this highly contentious situation a compromise was found: while the Church received greater autonomy with respect to local parishes, it was clarified that social welfare was the state’s responsibility.<sup>102</sup> Had the Swedish Church succeeded in separating from the state, opening the possibility for a more activist organized Christian social engagement, we can imagine a counterfactual situation where the state might have had to share the field of social welfare provision with the Church.

An important symbolic construction that helped bridge opposing positions in the state-church question was the theologically grounded concept of the “People’s Church” as developed by SAP politician and pastor Harald Hallén. It helped reconcile the more radical stance amongst SAP’s leadership with the religious beliefs of the majority of the Swedish people. Tying the Swedish Church via the

102. Nevertheless, as Leis demonstrates in this volume, there would remain in practice considerable overlap of activity between the state and religiously based organizations with respect to social welfare provision long into the second half of the twentieth century.

people church concept to the Social Democratic “People’s Home” made Protestantism part of the image of a politically progressive Social Democratic welfare state.

In conclusion, “consensus” is not a very useful concept for understanding state-church relations in Sweden in the early twentieth century. Rather, it is the forging of compromise that characterized the religious politics of the time, a compromise that was necessitated as well as facilitated by the multiple class and religious affiliations of politicians and churchmen alike, and that cut across party lines. It has been emphasized that the successful creation of alliances and compromises across social cleavages laid the basis for the postwar welfare state in Sweden. The renegotiation of state-church relations discussed in this article should be regarded as one of these core political settlements of modern Swedish society.

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